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ABSTRACT

In 1972, an Act passed by the South Carolina Legislature created a new state advisory board for the state's 16 Technical Educational Centers. In order to increase uniformity and centralization of the development, approval, and implementation of curricula and to change state funding allocations from a curriculum cost basis to an individual course cost basis, the new advisory board decided to create a Catalog of Approved Courses. The FTE's produced by individual course enrollment would constitute the unit of measure for institutional funding. This report illustrates the procedure for administering phase four of Catalog development: establishing objectives for each course and stating them in behavioral terms. Instructors of Human Relations from 14 institutions participated in the development of a unified course with state-wide applicability. The objectives of the project were: (1) to analyze the current status of the course as it is taught at each institution; (2) to identify objectives of the course which will provide for both uniformity in a state system and flexibility at the institutional level; (3) provide experiences for instructors in the development of individualized learning modules; (4) produce modules; and (5) plan for the continual development of the course via a model of participation. (DC)

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THE UNIFORMITY-FLEXIBILITY GAP IN CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT: AN EXPERIMENT WITH PROMISE

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THE UNIFORMITY-FLEXIBILITY GAP IN CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT: AN EXPERIMENT WITH PROMISE

> "if a curricular idea is to be enacted competently and with a continuity that transcends the life of a given (instructor) in a given (institution), it must be embedded in an explicitly institutional apparatus of support and control." - McKinney

Can instructors from fourteen institutions with varied professional backgrounds productively engage in the development of a single course which has system-wide applicability? Yes, they can. Can instructors who value quite highly autonomy and flexibility respond to state level leadership in the interest of system uniformity? It appears that they can.

This paper discusses a system-wide pilot project to revise and restructure a course in Human Relations which is a required course in several diploma and degree programs in the institutions represented in the project. In brief, the objectives of the project were: (1) analyze the current status of the course at it is taught at the different institutions, (2) identity the objectives of the course which will provide for both uniformity in a state system and flexibility at the institutional level, (3) provide experiences for instructors in the development of individualized learning modules,

(4) produce modules, which when completed will constitute the course, and (5) plan for the continual development of the course via a model of participation.

Background

The Technical Education Centers in South Carolina represent a rather unique development of post-secondary, comprehensive, two-year institutions. Envisioned in the late 1950's and created during the decade of the 60's, the Technical Education Centers constituted a statewide training vehicle to solve many pressing and complicated economic problems in South Carolina. The original concept was to provide an immediate trained work force for industries enticed to move into the state and on-going educational and training programs that would guarantee a constant flow of trained personnel to meet the future needs of a varied and expanding industry.

The enterprise was guided by a State Advisory Committee for Technical Training appointed by the Governor, with a mandate and priority to adapt to both local and statewide manpower needs. Thirteen strategically located institutions (Centers) were planned which required local participation in (1) the erection of physical facilities, (2) the determination of appropriate

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training programs, and (3) local governance and administration. In 1973, the last of the planned Centers was completed and began operation in Aiken, South Carolina.

Earlier, in 1969, the State Advisory Committee assumed responsibility for the operation of three area trade schools which had formerly been under the direction and control of the State Board of Education and which offered secondary level industrial and trade programs. In 1974, two private junior colleges in Columbia and Charleston were merged with the existing Technical Education Centers in those metropolitan communities. The system (TEC) presently consists of sixteen institutions, two of which have multi-campus activities.

In 1972, an Act passed by the South Carolina legislature created the State Board for Technical and Comprehensive Education to succeed the former State Advisory Committee for Technical Training. The Act gave to the new State Board appropriate jurisdiction "over all two-year, state-supported, post-secondary institutions and their programs that are presently operating and any created in the future. Excepted are the present university branches and centers, which shall continue the present programs under the direction of the University of South Carolina and Clemson University, respectively."

The Act was a culmination of several years of studies concerned with post-secondary educational needs in the state and the future structure for an institutional delivery system. The branch campuses of the universities had a meaningful and vested community identification but the educational programs offered were associate degree level extensions of the home institutions and therefore were not comprehensive in the sense in which that term identifies a "community" college.

Conversly, the Technical Education Centers were heavily oriented to community needs with primary and committed emphasis on technical-vocational occupational training. But, during the period 1964-1970, an evolution in programming and curricular offerings occured at the Centers. Without de-emphasizing the efforts to provide appropriate curricula in industrial technologies and occupational trades and crafts, the institutions added programs in agriculture, business, health and public services in response to a wider range of manpower needs.

Concurrently, as a result of a free-access philosophy and open door admission policies, a small but increasing number of students in the Centers desired to transfer their credits and programs to senior institutions. Modification of curricula at senior institutions and the emphasis on the career

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ladder concept of formal degree structure created a situtation in which many of the associate in applied science programs were "de facto" college parallel. The institutions were becoming comprehensive with regional accreditation in the catagory of colleges, but they lacked the one program type necessary for institutional identification as comprehensive "community" colleges. That specific program type is that usually referred to as Associate in Arts, liberal arts, or college parallel.

The Act by the legislature in 1972 did not create community colleges, per se, in South Carolina. It did, however, make possible (upon local option and approvals by the State Board and the Commission on Higher Education) the addition of the "college parallel" program and the merging of two or more two-year institutions.

The Act provided for one other important development. It enabled university branches or university centers to become comprehensive institutions under the direction of the State Board. So, in effect, the Act granted to the Technical Education system the functions of comprehensive, community-oriented colleges and thereby avoided the unnecessary and undesirable creation of a community college system which would have added another layer of public higher education in the state.

In March 1974, after several years of concerned consideration about the name of the institutions in the system, the State Board developed a policy and criteria by which the Technical Education Centers could be named Technical Colleges. Requests for re-naming an institution must originate at the local level and be approved by the State Board. The major elements of the criteria to met were regional accreditation as colleges, demonstrable characteristics of a comprehensive college, and a strong program committment to technical-vocational education.

Implications for Curriculum Development

The changed legal basis and role of the State Advisory Committee for Technical Training to that of a State Board for Technical and Comprehensive Education set in motion a predictable, interesting and sometimes controversial series of policy considerations and implementation procedures associated with organizational change. Activities relating to the development, approval and implementation of curricula reflect and highlight issues and attitudes concerned with uniformity and centralization versus flexibility and autonomy. As expected, certain implications of these issue-resolving activities were immediately recognized (or intuited) by professional staff at both the state office level and at the local institutional level. The perceptions appeared respectively

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as both challenging and threatening. The interface of curriculum (development, modification and legitimization) with other sub-elements in a complex state system had to be encountered at both levels of responsibility. That curriculum cannot exist in isolation from all other elements in a large educational system was axiomatic and accepted as a given.

Fortunately or unfortunately, there was another given, i.e., the basic element or fact of "system life" to which all sub-elements relate is the stated based funding for the operational budgets at the institutions within the system. Currently, the funding process is being changed from allocations based on curriculum costs to one based on the cost of individual courses. In order for funding to be applied uniformly and fairly to all institutions, it appeared necessary to create a controlable mechanism for this purpose. A Catalog of Approved Courses was conceived as that mechanism. Courses listed, after approval, in the Catalog would be the basic funding elements which generate fundable FTE's. The FTE's produced by course enrollment would constitute the unit of measure for institutional funding. Obviously, other factors are involved in state system funding, but the designation of the course as the basic element for funding is more directly related to curriculum development.

The development of the Catalog of Approved Courses, initiated at the state office level but in conjunction with institutional personnel, was projected to be accomplished in four related phases: (1) completion of an institutional inventory of courses that existed in the system; (2) elimination of discrepencies and duplications and standardize course identification and credits; (3) creation of course descriptions which would uniformly appear in subsequent institutional catalogs; and (4) establishing, to the greatest degree possible, the objectives for each course in the system and stating them in objective behavioral terms.

A concurrent project with even wider implications for the uniformity-flexibility issue is being conducted with the objective to create curriculum models which will result in uniform length of programs in terms of credits required; agreed upon core requirements in general education and technical areas; and flexibility to meet institutional, student and manpower needs.

Phase one in the development of the Catalog of Approved Courses has been completed and phases two and three are currently underway. In anticipation of phase four, the project discussed in this paper was conceived by the State Director, Division of Educational Services, and designed and implemented by

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a graduate intern from the University of Texas.

Given the opposing elements in the system during a period of change (traditional institutional autonomy, faculty prorogatives, necessary uniformity, central authority in funding, curriculum approval processes, the integrity of the system as perceived by employers and senior institutions, transferability of credits and programs, flexibility to meet local needs, statewide program priorities, high cost of program duplication, et cetera) it appeared imperative to develop a participatory model by which state level leadership and institutional involvement in curiculum analysis and development could combine to accomplish the objectives of phase four in the development of the Catalog of Approved Courses.

Therefore, a course, Human Relations, was selected as the focus of a pilot project for several reasons. The course, taught at all of the institutions in the system, exemplified critical variations (1) in instructional methodology, (2) in subject matter content, (3) in learning objectives, and (4) in the academic qualifications and teaching experiences of those assigned to teach the course at the various institutions. The selection of this course was also influenced by the fact that the academic credentials and creative teaching

experience of the intern coincided with the general of the course. Furthermore, in addition to the benefits the project might have for the state office staff and the institutional participants, the project provided a significant leadership experience for the intern in problems associated with curriculum development in a state system.

Organization of the Project

The first step was to obtain by informal interviews initial data about faculty concern for the function and purpose of the course. It was immediately ascertained that most faculty sought assistance in the development of materials for their courses and desired some means of articulation with their colleagues at the other institutions in the system.

The informal interviews also revealed that the kinds of questions raised at the state level were similar to, and compatible with, the questions asked by instructors in the field. This confirmed a hoped for climate, i.e., compatibility at the two levels with respect to state needs and instructor perceived needs.

The next step involved the construction and use of a specific need survey among the participating institutions. The questionnaire ascertained whether or not the institutions were interested in a project addressing itself

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to the Human Relations course and if so, would an instructor who expressed an interest be permitted to participate. Instructors who completed the survey instrument were requested to submit copies of course syllabi. Through subsequent discussions with instructors and compilation of the topic areas included in the various syllabi, a broad outline of topics was organized for later utilization.

The next step was a discussion with all of the interested instructors via telephone talk-back facilities of the South Carolina Educational Television Network. (The ETV system with terminals in all of the Technical Education Centers, university branch campuses and in selected hospitals, combined with the small size of the state easily facilitates such statewide projects in South Carolina.) The broad outline of topics that had been compiled was used as a means of promoting some generalized discussion among the instructors. The outline opened the door for a discussion related to content of the course, identified interested instructors and established a basis for scheduling a face-to-face meeting between instructors and state office personnel.

The over-riding purpose of the project was to maximize the outcomes of involvement. In an effort to do this, the project included (1) an analysis of the Human Relations course as taught in the system, (2) an analysis of the

academic background and teaching experience of the instructors, (3) the development of skills in individualizing instruction, (4) the production of an instructional unit by each participant, (5) the development of system-applicable objectives for the course, and (6) a plan for a continual revue and development of the course.

The next step in the project was a workshop for instructors. The leadership strategy was to create an informal atmosphere and opportunities for the instructors to get acquainted. A unit that been developed (with a film learning activity) was presented as a stimulus for reaction. The discussion that followed the presentation provided for initial reaction to a Human Relations unit. The participants raised pertinent questions regarding the purpose of the course, appropriate content, and whether or not they could themselves develop more relevant materials than the commercial ones previously selected and viewed.

The large group meeting was followed by small group interaction in which the format was nondirective but designed to develop units using the commercial materials previously selected. The small groups enabled the participants to get to know each other and interact more readily. The results of the small group activities supported a conviction that they could develop

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more appropriate materials for their own students. At this point, the leadership strategy was to assist the individual participants to take specific steps to set goals for a Human Relations project which would result in specific outcomes.

The tasks assigned included the completion of a detailed questionnaire and identification and development of a specific unit in a content area. The summary of the questionnaire would enable all participants to ascertain where they were in respect to the course as it is taught statewide and provide them a basis for sharing information. Each participant agreed to assume responsibility for the identification of a content area commensurate with his interests and qualifications and the development of a unit around that content area.

The common format used was that suggested in Barton Herrscher's book, Implementing Individualized Instruction because it presents the development of modules in a clear, concise and simple manner. A format, agreed upon by all and understandable by all, of simplicity was necessary. How to develop such skills was not presented formally, i.e., in a workshop for that purpose only. The learning activities were condensed drastically and simplified in order to be taught, as such, over the telephone or during the intern's visits to the institutions.

The key to the success of the initial meeting was that it addressed a mutually compatible problem and engendered instructor comments that moved in a mutually desired direction. The tasks assigned were focused on the real problems that had been identified by the participants and which were solution oriented. In addition, the task assigned to each person was small in comparison to the projected total outcome in which all would equally share.

The premise of the intern's leadership role was that leadership in curriculum development must (1) pose a real solution to an actual instructor perceived problem, (2) identify and reinforce peer leadership among the group, (3) assign tasks that will produce specific outcomes, and (4) generate a total output that is far greater than the individual contribution.

The next group of activities included a follow-up on assigned tasks by phone or field visits, informal assistance to instructors on using the individualizing of instruction format, reinforcing and maintaining continuity in the project, and identifying peer leadership needed to continue the project beyond the intern's involvement.

The Model

The Model development involved the compilation of information based

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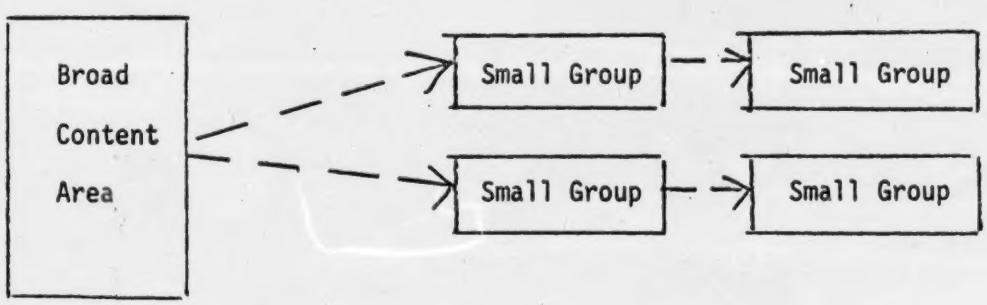
on knowledge of this specific curriculum, current research and readings, practical experiences and new ideas. The model developed was a Human Relations course that emphasized group or student interactions. It included (1) a broad content area class session to be followed by small interaction group meetings, (2) content units to be utilized as alternatives for student learning and as aids to the instructor, (3) broad objectives that could be adapted to the course throughout the TEC system, (4) an emphasis on group dynamics, and (5) specific considerations for the types of students who enroll at the institutions within the TEC system.

The Course Model Illustrated



Presented by lecture
or
by Individualized Instruction
or
by T.V.
or
by audio-tutorial

Followed by small group discussions

Followed by group dynamic exercises

Summary

Strategies Involved in the Project

1. Know where we are (course analysis) and where we are going (course

model.

2. Create a participatory model (instructor involvement and direction) to promote committment, continual development and usability of the product.

3. Begin with state level assumptions and needs interfaced with instructor and institutional needs.

4. Integrate into the project the learning or acquisition of needed new skills.

5. Integrate field leadership into the project in order to utilize their assistance and establish them as future leaders in statewide curriculum projects.

6. Produce a specific product which can be actualy utilized.

The long term outcomes of the project should be a continuation of such work and the evaluation of the materials developed. If the project is to remain viable as a participatory model in curriculum development, state level leadership must support the rationale of McKinney's premise that if a curricular idea is to be enacted competently and with a continuity that transcends the life of a given (intern) in a given (state system), it must be embedded in an explicitly institutional apparatus of support and control."

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